

Toward Zero Waste
**FOOD SERVICES
TOOLKIT**
Whatcom County

A step-by-step guide for
food related businesses



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View SustainableConnections.org for additional information such as:

- Posters and Signage
- Preferred Compostable Food Service Items

Thank you to our partners:



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Overview

Reducing waste may not be the first sustainable practice that comes to mind, but experts agree better management of solid waste and its accompanying systems is crucial for protecting our environment, mitigating climate change, and using our resources more wisely. In the United States, approximately \$200 billion is spent on managing waste alone. In addition, 40% of the food we produce is uneaten, and becomes the largest single component of waste in United States landfills – even more than plastic and paper.

More and more consumers are choosing to support businesses that adhere to sustainable practices. Research shows diners place food waste among the top three issues they want restaurants to focus on, and 56% of those surveyed would pay a premium for their meal if they knew the restaurant was committed to sustainability.

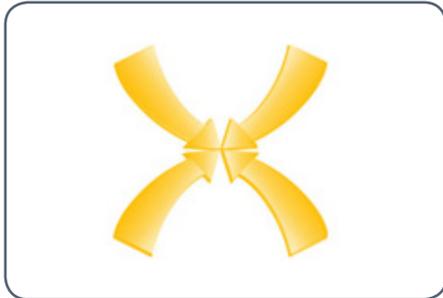
Food businesses can play a critical role in reducing waste, as on any given day, a single restaurant can produce approximately 25,000 to 75,000 pounds of food waste in one year.

What is Toward Zero Waste?

Toward Zero Waste (TZW) aims to reduce the amount of waste generated in the first place, while also increasing reuse, recycling, and composting of waste that is generated. Key components of TZW include:

- 1. Reducing** the amount of material needed to be disposed of by the solid waste system should be the first priority. The goal is not only to reduce the amount of landfill waste produced but also reduce the need for materials to be recycled or composted. Examples of ways to reduce waste include providing water refill stations instead of selling bottled water, buying products with minimal packaging, and determining accurate quantities of food needed.
- 2. Reusing** items as many times as possible reduces the need to produce items in the first place, conserves resources, and keeps materials out of landfills. Recent estimates indicate Americans use nearly 4 billion pieces of disposable serving ware for an average of less than 10 minutes before they are discarded – per year. Shifting to reusable serving ware whenever possible is a key component.
- 3. Recycling and Composting** comes after you have done all you can to reduce and reuse. Efforts should be made to produce as little waste as possible and then to recycle or compost as much as possible. Ideally, no waste would be sent to the landfill, but that isn't always possible. A good goal is to have less than 10% of your overall waste stream go to the landfill.

Create a Toward Zero Waste Plan



1. REDUCE



2. REUSE



**3. RECYCLE AND
COMPOST**

At the outset of your initiative, it is important to emphasize for everyone in your business why waste reduction is important for your bottom line, the environment, and the culture of your organization.

Create your Toward Zero Waste Team. Designate and empower an individual employee or group of employees to lead your Toward Zero Waste efforts. Many employees are looking for ways to align their values with their work and leading a waste reduction effort is one way to do so. It is important to have at least one member of the team be an employee who is involved in the preparation of meals and also someone who is involved with leftovers after food has been served to customers.

A designated Toward Zero Waste Team:

- Establishes validity for the effort
- Creates buy-in from the entire staff
- Helps to identify challenges you may encounter that only your staff performing day-to-day duties may know
- Formalizes the effort and gives workers someone to turn to when they have questions



Track and Analyze Your Waste

There are numerous ways to track your waste, everything from a simple waste audit to complex software. Start with a free audit from Sustainable Connections; or commit to the most thorough and revealing waste assessment process which is conducted daily over a time of approximately one month. LeanPath is one of the leading companies helping reduce food waste, and has some great free tools for tracking waste. In general, waste in food businesses is categorized in three ways: kitchen waste (back-of-the-house), packaging waste, plate waste (front-of-the-house).

Track your Waste

1. Collect your waste hauling bills to confirm the cost and services you currently have. You can also inquire about other available services to see what your options are.

2. Conduct an initial waste assessment. Request a free waste assessment from Sustainable Connections or Sanitary Service Company, or conduct your own. If you decide you would like to conduct a waste audit on your own, the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) has some great resources.

3. Analyze the results of your waste audit and look for areas where you can improve. It is important to quantify the total waste generated in each category *and* understand the reasons for the waste generation. For example, utilizing a particular garnish that is consistently left on the plate by customers is an indication you should either not serve that garnish or ask customers if they would like it with their meal. Pay particular attention to common items that make up the majority of your waste such as:

- o Plastic, tin, aluminum, and glass (recyclable)
- o Mixed paper (recyclable)
- o Film plastics – shrink wraps, clean plastic bags, plastic securing beverage flats (recyclable)
- o Cardboard (recyclable)
- o Food waste (compostable)
- o Food soiled paper products (compostable)
- o Foiled paper (destined for the landfill)
- o Food soiled plastic wrap (destined for the landfill)
- o Food soiled plastic bags (destined for the landfill)
- o Broken crockery and glassware (destined for the landfill)

4. Refine your Toward Zero Waste plan based upon your findings.

5. Conduct a follow up waste assessment after you have started implementing your plan

TIP – When you enlist Sustainable Connections or Sanitary Service Company to help conduct your waste assessment, you will receive a report to help you prioritize your actions. You will also gain valuable knowledge based upon years of experience helping businesses reduce waste. The report will include recommendations tailored to your business, and are specific to our community and available waste services.



Source Reduction: The most beneficial and cost effective Toward Zero Waste strategy is to not create the waste in the first place. Purchasing only needed amounts of goods necessary to produce your products prevents unneeded materials from ever being created, and you can save money by reducing purchasing costs, handling costs, and disposal fees.

Use What You Have

- Maintain a tracking system for spoiled foods including why the food was spoiled – was it due to improper storage or over-purchasing? Adjust procedures as needed.
- Properly store and organize all foods. Good organization and storage of foods encourages proper rotation (first in first out), and makes ordering easier.
- Menu flexibility – having a flexible menu will help to utilize leftover foods. Daily specials incorporating leftovers and overages are a great way to get creative and utilize your culinary skills while reducing waste.
- Staff training – proper prep and knife skills ensure meals are prepared properly, reducing waste and food sent back to the kitchen.
- Carefully consider plating and portion sizes. If certain dishes are rarely finished completely, look to reduce the size of the portion served. It is important your patrons do not go home hungry, but working to find the balance will pay off in the end.
- Offer garnishes by request. Food presentation is an important aspect of food service, but each small inedible or rarely eaten garnish adds up. Not only do they increase food waste and disposal costs; they incur labor cost to prepare and plate.

TIP – Buffets moving to a tray-less system consistently see reductions in food waste of approximately 25-30 percent. An additional action of informing guests to take only what they can eat is also effective. Signs near the buffet explaining why you are working to reduce food waste give patrons an additional reason to be aware.

Feed People and Animals

Once you have worked hard to reduce the amount of waste created, the next most valuable step is to donate edible food to people and/or animals.

Donate to Feed People

Contact local food banks, soup kitchens, and faith based organizations to build relationships and determine how excess food might be donated. It works best to have an understanding of how your donation might be helpful **before** you find yourself with an over abundance.

TIP - Many food providers worry about legal liability related to their donated food. However, the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (Public Law 104-210) protects food donors from legal liability if they donate in good faith and without gross negligence. Food donations may be tax deductible.

Feed Animals

Many food producers have forged relationships with farmers and livestock producers to have their food waste picked up, often at no charge. While feeding animals is the next best diversion strategy after feeding people, be aware of the challenges.

- Check with the Whatcom County Health Department to understand current regulations.
- Make sure those who accept your food waste for animal consumption are authorized to do so.
- Consistent and dependable pick up schedules are a necessity. Missed pickups can create a major challenge for everyone.



Recycle and Compost

It is somewhat counterintuitive that recycling and composting are the last steps before sending waste to landfill. However, all beneficial uses of a particular item should be exhausted before more energy and resources are used to transform or repurpose it.

Recycle:

- Purchase products that are recyclable or compostable.
- Determine appropriate recycling bin placements for kitchen staff, front of house, and customers.
- Make sure all bins are well-signed. Signage is available from Sustainable Connections
- Flatten or compress packaging and containers whenever possible before placing in the waste hauler bins.
- Monitor frequently for contamination of waste streams. If it is occurring, determine why and make corrections.
- Staff recognition, awards or companywide incentives can really help get your Toward Zero Waste effort off the ground and keep it going strong.

Compost:

Whatcom County is fortunate to have a commercial composting facility centrally located and in close proximity to many businesses. This keeps costs reasonable and reduces the carbon footprint of hauling compostable waste. Additionally, commercial composting facilities create more local jobs.

- Determine appropriate composting bin placements for kitchen staff, front of house, and customers.
- Make sure all bins are well-signed. Signage is available from Sustainable Connections
- Use compostable bin liners only where necessary.
- Monitor frequently for contamination of waste streams. If it is occurring, determine why and make corrections.
- If contamination is an ongoing issue conduct a staff refresher or retraining.

Landfill:

By following many of the steps included in this tool kit you will be able to drastically reduce the amount of waste you send to landfill. Many restaurants and food producers are successful in diverting over 80% of their waste from landfill after their waste reduction efforts. The end result is cost savings and decreased environmental impact.

TIP – Many restaurants repurpose plastic buckets for collecting compostable kitchen waste. The 4 gallon square buckets are small enough to fit through a dishwasher, or are easily washed by hand. Since food waste is heavy, smaller containers can help reduce workplace injury.



Hiring and Training

Make sure that waste reduction and the systems you use are a part of training for ALL employees. During the hiring process, look for employees who are familiar with waste reduction whether in prior employment or at home.

Celebrate & Promote!

Do not let your efforts go unnoticed! Especially in our community, customers are looking to support businesses operating with sustainability in mind. Proudly display and promote your Toward Zero Waste efforts on social media, informational in-store signage, table tents, or in a sustainability report. Sustainable Connections can also help you promote your good efforts!

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